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## NOTES AND DISCUSSION.

## HISTORICAL NOTICES.

## I.

**Alexander and his gold-lettered Scroll.**—An old and unimpeachable tradition<sup>1</sup> tells of a personage who, wishing to mark the esteem in which he held the Law in a special and unique manner, had all the names of God in his copy of the Pentateuch overlaid with gold. He must have been a very wealthy individual to have been able to pay for so expensive a work. In the original sources, whence this tradition is taken, Alexander is given as the name of this person. This Alexander could certainly not have been Alexander Janneus, the king, for he is never referred to in Talmudic literature by the Greek name Alexander, but always as 'נא', the abbreviated form of his Hebrew cognomen; and, in the second place, his title *king* is never omitted. He is always styled 'נא מלכא' or 'נא המלך'. The Alexander of our tradition is clearly, therefore, not King Alexander Janneus. Though not royal, this Alexander must, nevertheless, have possessed a royal fortune, which circumstance points to the famous Arabarch, Alexander Lysimachus, brother of Philo, the philosopher, as the hero of the story. Concerning him the following facts are known:—

(1.) He was the possessor of great wealth, and this, combined with his noble descent, placed him in the foremost rank among his contempo-

<sup>1</sup> This tradition appears in two sources in precisely the same form, and in a third somewhat varied. In *Massechet Soferim*, I, 9, and in *Massechet Sefer Torah*, I, 10, it reads: 'אין כותבין בזהב ומעשה בתורתן של אלכסנדריים שהיו כל אזכרותיה כתובות בזהב ובא מעשה לפני חכמים ואמרו תננו be noted that a manuscript in the possession of Halberstamm has the variant 'בתורתן של אלכסנדרים'. In Schönblum's edition of the *Massechet Soferim*, II., 7 (Lemberg, 1877), the passage runs differently: 'ספר תורה שאזכרותיה תלויות בזהב לא יקרא בו ומעשה בספרו של אלכסנדר שהיו אזכרותיה תלויות בזהב ובא מעשה לפני חכמים ואמרו אותו עליהן אלכסנדר (Alexander) is certainly more correct than אלכסנדרים (the Alexandrians). For, though an individual might have indulged in such an extravagant luxury, it is hardly credible that a community should have done so. This would be the correction of the conjecture suggested in my History, Vol. III., p. 135.

The phrase 'תלויות בזהב' is deserving of notice. 'כתוב בזהב' is not quite intelligible. Can one write with gold? Can gold be fluidized sufficiently to serve this purpose? But the word 'תלויות' emended to 'טלי' offers a solution of the difficulty. The expression 'טלי' in the Talmudic dialect, signifies a patch. The golden letters of God's name would thus have been written characters, covered with gold plating into alto-relievo.

raries.<sup>1</sup> Agrippa I., while still a princely adventurer, borrowed of him 2,000 drachms<sup>2</sup> = over £6,000.

(2.) He managed the estates which Antonia,<sup>3</sup> daughter of the triumvir, Marcus Antonius, sister of Augustus, had inherited from Cleopatra. This lady was the reputed wife of Nero Claudius Drusus, and mother of the Emperor Claudius. Alexander's excellent management of Antonia's estates secured him the friendship of her son Claudius. Like King Agrippa I., Alexander was adopted into the Julian family, and received the honourable name of Julius Alexander. Alexander occupied so high and distinguished a position, that he was deemed not unworthy of an alliance with the royal family. His son contracted an engagement with the king's eldest daughter, the celebrated but infamous Princess Berenice.<sup>4</sup>

(3.) He had the new gates of the Temple of Jerusalem, which Herod had left unadorned, ornamented with massive plates of gold and silver.<sup>5</sup>

All these considerations clearly prove that Alexander Lysimachus must have been enormously wealthy. It was he, then, who freely lavished his wealth on the production of a work of piety, which compelled attention by its dazzling beauty. Only this particular Alexander could have afforded the cost of a scroll so elaborately prepared that every name of God, wherever it occurs—and it recurs pretty frequently in the Pentateuch—was overlaid with letters of gold.

The "wise men," however, spoilt the pleasure he felt in the work which his wealth, magnificent tastes and piety had suggested to him. They decided that the scroll could not be used for public reading. It was to be laid aside, and declared apocryphal תננן;<sup>6</sup> i.e., it belonged to that class of books which have indeed a sacred character, or contain valuable doctrines, but are still not to be used for synagogal purposes. The wise men declared themselves against the employment of such a scroll, probably because they thought that the expression וכתב meant strictly and literally that the Torah had to be written, and raised letters of gold could not be called writing in the strict sense of the term. A few historical data may be determined in connection with this incident, which are not without a certain interest of their own.

Who could the wise men have been who forbade the Arabarch, Alexander Lysimachus, the use of his splendid scroll? Alexander was a senior contemporary of Agrippa I. In his reign, Hillel's grandson, the patriarch Rabbi Gamaliel, the supposed teacher of Paul the Apostle, was the leading authority. He and his college, then, were probably the "wise men" who issued the prohibition.

How did they come to know that a wealthy and distinguished Alexandrian was in possession of a scroll which did not quite meet the requirements of the law?

There is sufficient warranty for affirming that Philo, Alexander's brother, was at one time in Jerusalem, and offered up a sacrifice in the Temple. His description of the Feast of the Baskets (*de festo cophini*), i.e., the solemnity in connexion with the bringing of the Firstfruits, affords clear evidence that he was present in Jerusalem on the occasion of such a feast, and personally witnessed the ceremony. In the *Monatsschrift* (1877, pp. 432, sq.), I have demonstrated convincingly, I

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, *Antiqq.*, XX. v. 2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, XVIII. vi 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, XIX. v. 1.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Wars*, V. v. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Compare *Gittin*, 45b, ישרף כתבו נכרי ינו, ספר תורה שכתבו מין.

believe, that Philo paid a visit to Jerusalem during Agrippa's reign, probably in that year when the entire people brought their firstfruits to the Sanctuary with jubilation and solemn pomp, in gratitude to God for having averted the desecration and dishonour with which Caligula had threatened the Temple. Philo might have come to Jerusalem to take part in this rejoicing, and perhaps also to greet Agrippa, who had returned from Rome, laden with honours by the Emperor Claudius, and proclaimed ruler over the whole of Judæa.

The Arabarch Alexander may have accompanied his brother Philo with the same object. The fact that he had the gates of the Temple ornamented with gold and silver certainly indicates a visit on his part to the Holy Capital. The Jews of that time looked upon the rescue of the Sanctuary from the pollution Caligula intended for it by the murder of that madman as a kind of miracle, an emphatically clear mark of divine interposition. This episode may have suggested to him the idea of adorning the Temple that enjoyed the Almighty's special protection, and thus testifying the high reverence in which he held it. For the Alexandrians, too, venerated the Sanctuary of Jerusalem as a sacred fane.

If, then, Alexander was in the Holy City with his brother Philo at the time when the rescue of the Temple from violation and Agrippa's coronation had made all Judæa happy, he may well have come into contact with the synhedrial body and its president, Gamaliel. They were probably told that he had had a costly scroll prepared, in which the letters of God's name were relieved with a plating of pure gold. In this sense we must understand the expression *ובא מעשה לפני חכמים*, "The matter came to the notice of the sages." Their decision that he could not be allowed to use his splendid scroll, which must have come to Alexander as an unpleasant surprise, was probably communicated to him personally. It is difficult to believe that after a scroll had been prepared at so much cost, the question whether it could be used would have been sent in writing all the way from Alexandria to the authorities at Jerusalem. It is more likely to have come up for discussion in a cursory manner. The Halachic rule that a Torah scroll should not be written in letters of gold, or, following the better reading, that golden letters must not be used for ornamenting God's name, originates in the time of the Arabarch Alexander and his contemporary, the patriarch Gamaliel. The decision of this single instance was made a general law. Most Halachas, not formally proposed as theses for discussion, may be conceived as having had a similar genesis. They are decisions of isolated cases that became accepted as universally binding laws.<sup>1</sup>

## II.

**Burning the Talmud in 1322.**—Dr. Neubauer once communicated from a Bodleian codex (Oriental Canon 496, now No. 1,061), a Hebrew elegy, which has for its theme the burning of the Talmud in 1322, and the author of which styles himself in the poem, acrostically, Joab (Frankel-Graetz, *Monatsschrift*, 1872, pp. 376, etc.). Its superscription reads as follows: *קינה על התלמוד אשר שלח בו יד (בוגד) ואיש (יין יוסף)*. The burning of the Talmud is

<sup>1</sup> Compare Mishna, *Yebamoth*, XV. 3, לא דברו חכמים בקציר אלא בהוה.